

Understanding Legal Descriptions

Government surveying of townships is run from starting lines called base lines and principal meridians. These legal descriptions are based on a system that uses a grid with two sides, one being townships and the other ranges. Within each “square” of the grid is a section, and each section contains 640 acres.

Every description of land should show the section, township and range it is located in. Theoretically, a township is a square tract of land with sides of six miles each, and containing 36 sections of land. The rectangular system divides the land into square tracts, and square measure is in terms of acres. The location of the land is in such terms as N½ (north one-half), SE¼ (south east one-fourth or quarter), etc.

Descriptions of land always read first from either the North or the South, such as NE (northeast) or SW (southwest), etc. They are never WN (westnorth) or ES (eastsouth), etc.

It is comparatively easy to understand a rectangular land description, that is, to determine where the tract of land is located from even a long description. First, find the Township number located on the right or left side of the map. Then find the Range number located on the top or bottom of the map. Next, find the point where the Township and Range intersect in the map. This is your Township. Last, locate the Section number you’re looking for in your Township.

